



PRESS RELEASE

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New Marble-Processing Facility Inaugurated at Marble Conference Opening

HIRAT, AFGHANISTAN | MAY 25, 2011 — In its third year, the Afghanistan International Marble Conference opened in Hirat Province with a ribbon-cutting ceremony for Equity Capitol Mining's new \$6-million modern marble-processing plant. Constructed through a multi-national effort and with USAID's support, the Doost Marble Plant, plans to export more than \$2 million of the highest-quality marble each month, and create 140 direct and 500 indirect jobs for Afghans.

Speaking at the ribbon cutting, U.S. Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry emphasized the remarkable progress of the Afghan marble industry and the continuing need to develop this valuable resource. Ambassador Eikenberry said: "Expanding the marble industry in Afghanistan has the potential to create thousands of jobs, stabilize a struggling economy, and generate a significant amount of revenue for both the Afghan private sector and the Afghan government."

The two-day conference is bringing together hundreds of marble producers, processors, business representatives, international investors, and government officials to showcase the country's wealth of marble, address industry challenges, and to learn about new investment and business opportunities. The second day of the conference will feature presentations from the Ministry of Mines, the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA), the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Export Promotion Agency of Afghanistan to address the industry's potential, the investment climate, and doing business in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan marble boasts more than 100 high quality varieties, spanning diverse colors and patterns. Current marble exports are estimated at \$15 million per year. With improved extraction, processing, infrastructure, and investment, the industry has the potential to grow into a \$450 million per year business.

This year's conference was organized in the framework a strategic partnership between the Afghanistan Marble Industry Association and the Government of Afghanistan, AISA, and with support from USAID and the Italian Embassy. USAID is working closely with the Afghan Government, international donors, Afghan marble industry associations, and the private sector to maximize the potential of Afghanistan's marble sector to generate employment, attract greater investment, and increase industry profits.

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